

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

# Making It Work

Department of Education

## A Student's Story

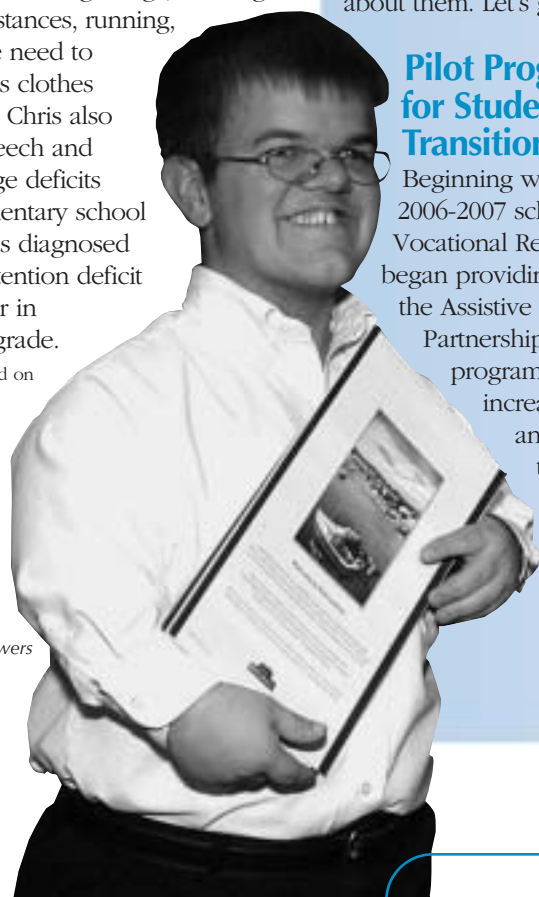
### Awesome Kid!

"An awesome kid. Always upbeat. Likes people and people like him. Exceptional teenager. Insight surpasses his age. Funny, bright, has a great heart." These are just a few phrases people have used to describe Chris Powers. This may not sound so remarkable until you hear Chris' story.

Chris was born with achondroplasia dwarfism, a condition causing his arms and legs to be short and the trunk of his body to be normal size. This presents many challenges for daily living such as driving, carrying books, reaching things, walking long distances, running, and the need to have his clothes altered. Chris also had speech and language deficits in elementary school and was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder in fourth grade.

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Chris Powers



## Connections: A Look at Resources

# Happenings in Assistive Technology

Things are happening in the world of assistive technology in Nebraska. An already great resource – the Assistive Technology Partnership (ATP) – just got better! There are so many exciting developments at ATP of particular interest to students with disabilities and their families that we've set aside most of this issue to tell you about them. Let's get started...

### Pilot Program for Students in Transition

Beginning with the 2006-2007 school year, Vocational Rehabilitation began providing funds to the Assistive Technology Partnership for a pilot program to help increase awareness and use of technology for students transitioning from school to work.

Under the pilot, Assistive Technology Transition Specialists offer the following services in selected areas and schools across the state:

- Dissemination of information on assistive technology solutions and resources for students with disabilities transitioning to post-secondary or vocational settings;
- Coordination of demonstrations and loans of assistive devices for trial use at school and at work sites; and
- Provision of limited technical assistance in the use of assistive devices at school and work sites.

These services will target students with disabilities, their families, educators, employers, Vocational Rehabilitation staff, and the general public. Students do not have to be Vocational Rehabilitation clients to receive this assistance.

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# Happenings in Assistive Technology...continued

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The pilot program is in the early stages of development and the specific schools to be included have not yet been selected. Those in the affected areas will be notified once the selections are made. The pilot will continue throughout the current school year, with the program's outcomes to be evaluated at the end of the school year. If proven successful, it is anticipated that the program may be extended.

## AT4All

Another development in the Assistive Technology world is the creation of a new, easy-to-use website to assist persons with disabilities in accessing assistive technology equipment and devices.

The website, <http://www.AT4all.com>, offers a new way to connect people in Nebraska with the equipment

they need and also provide them a place to sell equipment they no longer use. It is intended that this will become a one-stop resource for the re-use and lending of assistive technology. This allows for the recycling of quality items stored in homes, hospitals, and schools across the state.



*AT4All:  
a one-stop  
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technology.*

There is no charge (that's right, it's free!) for the use of this website. It includes a wide variety of equipment that may have previously been difficult to locate. Items such as stair and bath lifts, wheelchairs, bathing aids, scooters, communication aids, accessible homes, and modified vehicles may be located with the click of a mouse. New items are being added daily. Check out the site now!

## Welcome Home!

The Assistive Technology Partnership and multiple partners have developed a new, FREE, online listing and locating service for housing. The website, located at <http://www.housing.ne.gov>, provides easy access to information about rental housing opportunities throughout Nebraska.

## What does the site offer?

Individuals are able to search for rental housing that best fits their needs. Searches can be completed in a variety of ways ranging from broad to specific, including:

- location (by city, region, or zip code);
- number of bedrooms and bathrooms;
- rent amount;
- whether or not the rent is income-based;
- acceptance of a rental subsidy;
- accessibility features (with the ability to address very specific accessibility needs);
- proximity to schools and public transportation;
- security deposit amount; and
- much more!

## How are properties listed?

Property owners and managers are able to register and manage their listings online or via phone. Properties can be described in detail and can include pictures, maps, and information about nearby amenities. Property listings are updated regularly so that searchers can be certain that the unit they desire is available.



## What else is planned?

Future plans for the site include adding links to other helpful resources, as well as tools for renters, including an affordability calculator, a rental checklist, and renter rights and responsibilities (some of which are already available). Information on supportive services throughout Nebraska, especially those services linked to housing needs, will also be available.

## For more information

Individuals, landlords, and service providers who do not have access to the internet or need further assistance may call toll free at 1.877.428.8844.

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## A Student's Story

# Awesome Kid! . . . continued

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As if that isn't enough, there are more challenges Chris has faced! Due to an unstable situation with his birth mother, Chris went to live with his aunt and uncle, Denise and Ron Smith, when he was six years old. He had been diagnosed with borderline mental retardation in preschool. This turned out to be a misdiagnosis, due to the fact that he hadn't had enough stimuli in the home to develop. Denise and Ron became

his legal guardians and, in their nurturing environment, it became apparent that Chris was extremely bright.

Chris is now in his last year at Grand Island Senior High School, preparing for a bright future. Many things had to come together to make that future possible. Chris had major surgery on his legs at Shriner's Hospital in Minneapolis at age 12,

followed by a painful process of physical therapy. He's needed minor accommodations at school, including using the elevator instead of stairs and using a roller book bag. Chris says, "At first, I didn't want to use the book bag because it made me feel different and awkward (I kept running over people's feet), but many people thought it was cool and they wanted one too. I decided it wasn't so bad."

Getting a driver's license is a rite of passage for most teens, as well as a skill necessary for independent living and employment.

For a person of short stature, this is a more difficult process. While investigating the possibility of hand controls for their vehicle, the family was referred to Vocational Rehabilitation (Voc Rehab). With the assistance of Voc Rehab Transition Specialist Robert Garcia and Roxanne Rowley of the Assistive Technology Partnership, the necessary adaptations were made to the family vehicle and later transferred to Chris' car.

Having the proper equipment for driving was just one step in the process. Chris also needed the proper training. Through an agreement with his school, instruction was provided by the Center for Independent Living of Central Nebraska. Ron and Denise had specific expectations for Chris related to studying for the driver's test, as well as other rules regarding driving while friends are with him in the car. He says, "Driving is fun. It's also a big responsibility." Chris had a lesson in responsibility by paying for the damages after an accident in which he backed into a friend's car in the church parking lot.

Between surgeries, physical therapy, driver's training, school, church, and volunteer activities, one would assume that Chris doesn't have time for much else in his life. Wrong! Chris works as a host at Red Lobster, responsible for seating and greeting customers and bussing tables. Prior to this job, Voc Rehab assisted him in finding a job at Sonic. The Assistive Technology Partnership assisted in getting the accommodation of a steel platform that he needed to safely do the work at Sonic.

When the hours at Sonic weren't meeting his needs, Chris went out on his own to find the Red Lobster job. He feels that he is well suited to this job that allows him to interact with people. He says, "It felt awesome to get this job on my own!"

Denise points out that finding many of the services for Chris came about because they just "happened" upon some of the organizations. While they were accustomed to advocating for Chris in the school system, they weren't aware of all of the other resources available to them. She says, "My advice to parents would be to educate yourself on what resources are out there...we didn't realize that we didn't have to do it alone."

What's next for Chris? He plans to attend Central Community College in Grand Island for two years and then transfer to a four year university to get a degree in accounting. Voc Rehab has assisted him in career planning activities and vocational counseling that have reinforced this plan. No doubt that you can now clearly see why Voc Rehab Associate, Shara Madison, described Chris as an "Awesome Kid!"



***"It felt  
awesome  
to get this  
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own!"***

Chris Powers

## Happenings in Assistive Technology . . . continued

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The service is supported by a bilingual call center Monday through Friday, from 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Additional information may also be obtained by contacting Lauren Shafenberg, ATP's Housing Resource Specialist, at 1.888.806.6287 or e-mail at [lauren.shafenberg@atp.ne.gov](mailto:lauren.shafenberg@atp.ne.gov).

### More About the Assistive Technology Partnership

These programs only begin to demonstrate the many benefits for transition students and their families in working with the Assistive Technology Partnership. Other benefits include:

- Students, their families, and schools are able to locate information and services beyond the classroom. Appropriate and cost effective assistive technology solutions for students at home, work, and in their communities are able to be identified.
- Access is provided to funding, housing information, low cost equipment, and other resources.
- Educators have the opportunity to access the expertise and experience of a variety of technology experts, service providers, and vendors.

- Students have opportunities, through ATP's demonstration and loan equipment, to try before buying.

For further information regarding the Assistive Technology Partnership or to find an office near you, visit their website at: <http://www.nde.state.ne.us/ATP> or call toll free at 1.888.806.6287.

#### For More Information:

Contact the State Vocational Rehabilitation Office in Lincoln at **1-402-471-3644** or toll free at **1-877-637-3422**.

You may obtain information on the Voc Rehab Service Office in your area by calling these numbers or accessing the Service Office listing on the web at: <http://www.vocrehab.state.ne.us/vr/office.html>

### About this Publication

This publication, produced by Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation, is intended for students with disabilities and their families. The next issue, Volume #22, is scheduled for distribution in February, 2007.

Please contact us if you:

- Would like additional copies of this publication.
- Have questions or would like more details about any of the information contained in this issue.
- Have a success story you'd like to share with us.
- Have suggestions for topics for future issues.
- Wish to be removed from the mailing list for this publication.

To view previous issues of this or other Vocational Rehabilitation publications, or to receive a free subscription to these publications, go to: <http://www.vocrehab.state.ne.us/vr/newsstand.htm>. You may also contact the Vocational Rehabilitation State Office toll free at 1-877-NE-REHAB (1-877-637-3422) to receive these publications.

### Additional Resources

If you have questions or concerns about services from Vocational Rehabilitation or are looking for additional disability resources, contact the Hotline for Disability Services/Client Assistance Program at 1-800-742-7594 or in Lincoln at 402-471-0801 or e-mail [victoria.rasmussen@cap.ne.gov](mailto:victoria.rasmussen@cap.ne.gov)

